Vniformity Examined:

Whether it be found in the

GOSPEL,

OR,

IN THE PRACTICE OF

THE

CHURCHES of CHRIST.

By WIL. DELL, Minister of the Gospel.

2 COR. 4. 13.

We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed and therefore have I spoken: wee also beleeve, and therefore speake.

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Uniformity Examined.

OBſerving that our Brethren of *Scotland*, together with the Aſſembly of Divines, and the reſt of the Preſbyterian judgement, do often both in their diſcourſe and writings, exceedingly preſſe for *Uniformity*; I have been urged in my ſpirit, to think upon the matter, and to conſider whether there could be any ſuch thing found in the word of the *New Teſtament*, or in the practice of the Churches of Chriſt. And for my part, I ingenuouſly profeſſe I cannot yet diſcover it, and would be glad if any would inſtruct me further in this particular, ſo he do it from the Word.

Now *Uniformity* what is it, but an unity of form? and the form they mean, no doubt, is outward: for the inward form, as it cannot be known by the outward ſenſes; ſo neither can it be accompliſhed by outward power. And therefore (till I know their meaning better) I conceive that by *uniformity* they underſtand an unity of outward form in the Churches of God: yea ſome of them do declare ſo much, calling the thing they would have, *Externall uniformity*.

Now ſuch a thing as this (after ſo much meditation and recollection, as my other imployments, and the many diſtractions that neceſſarily attend my preſent condition, will permit me) I cannot diſcern in the word of the Goſpell. For Chriſt ſpeaking of the Church of the New Teſtament, ſaith, *John* 4 23. *The hour cometh and now is, When the true Worſhippers ſhall Worſhip the Father in Spirit and Truth, for the Father ſeeketh ſuch to Worſhip him. God is a Spirit, and and they that worſhip him muſt Worſhip him in Spirit and Truth.* In which words it is moſt evident, that the worſhip of God in the time of the New Teſtament, is inward and ſpirituall, conſiſting in faith, hope, love, and prayer, the operation of the three former, &c. And ſo, is ſo far from *Uniformity* as hath been explicated, and as they underſtand it, that it is not at all capable of it. And therefore I cannot but wonder at the ſtrange workings of darkneſſe in the mindes of men, who would have an externall *Uniformity* in a worſhip that is inward and ſpirituall, and of which the outward form is no part at all, but is meerly accidentall, and ſo abſolutely various.

Again,

Again, as I finde not this Uniformity in the doctrine of the Gospel, so neither in the practice of the Saints, who had the spirit of the Gospel, as that practice is represented to us in the Word.

In *Acts* 1.14. I read how the Apostles being together with the women, and *Mary* the Mother of Jesus, & his brethren, continued with one accord in prayer and supplication: and *Acts* 2. v. 44. & 46. how *all that believed were together, and continued daily with one accord in the Temple, and did break bread from house to house, &c.* And in all this there was Unity, but no externall *Uniformity*, neither name nor thing. Again, *Acts* 4. 23. *Peter* and *John* being let go by the Magistrates, *went to their own company* (which many of our Clergy would term a Conventicle) *and reported all that the chief Priests and Elders had said to them; and when they heard it, they lift up their voice to God ὁμοθυμαδὸν, with one accord, and prayed.* Here was inward Unity, in faith, and love, and joy, and spirituall prayer, but no externall Uniformity: and vers. 32. *The multitude of them that believed were of one heart, and one soul.* Unity still, but nothing of externall *uniformity*. Further, we read *Acts* chap. 7. and chap. 8. that *Stephen* and *Philip*, who by the Church were ordained Deacons and were to serve only for the Ministery of the Table, yet by vertue of the anointing, preached the word of God freely, and powerfully: and how all the Members of the Church of *Jerusalem*, who were neither Ministers nor Deacons, being scattered abroad by persecution, went preaching the Word every where, where they came, in that case of necessity: the unction of the Spirit, of which all believers partake alike, being one fundamentall ground of such Ministery, where there are no Believers to call to the Office: and in all this, though there was *unity* of faith, spirit, and doctrine, yet I am sure they will say, there was no such *uniformity* as they would have. Again, *Acts* 20. *Paul* the first day of the Week, preached to the Disciples of *Macedonia*, from the Evening till Midnight (which Dr. *Pocklington* in a printed Sermon saith, was out of order, that is, out of Prelaticall order, or Presbyteriall *uniformity*) and after brake bread and did eat, and talked with them a long while, till break of day: and going from thence, he arrived at *Ephesus*, and there called the Elders of the Church together, and appeals to them after what manner he had been with them, to wit, serving the Lord with all humility of minde, (I wish the Assembly would mark that, and mark it again) and with many tears and temptations, &c. and how he had held back nothing profitable for them, but had taught them publikely, and from house to house (which I wish were more in use now-a-dayes, if it might obtain so much leave from *uniformity*) and had preached to them Repentance towards God, and Faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, our chief work toward God since our fall and corruption being Repentance, which is the change of the creature towards God, through Gods own work in the creature, and this is not done without the sorrow of the heart; and our chief work towards Christ, who is given to us as a head, being Faith or Union. And in the end, exhorts the Presby-

ters to take heed to themselves (who according to the Church principles of this age, want no admonition themselves, seeing they are become a peremptory rule to all others) and to the flocks over which the holy Ghost (and not Patrons) hath made them overseers, to feed the Church of God which he had purchased with his own bloud, &c. But in all this neither practices himselfe, nor preaches to them, nor commands them to preach to others, or impose upon others any such kind of thing as externall *uniformity*. And so surely they that so vehemently urge this thing, that they make it all in all in their Reformation, have some other teacher then the Apostle, who being taught of Christ as Christ was taught of God, yet knew no such thing at all in the worship of God, as *uniformity*.

And yet further, that the world (if it be possible) may be the more convinced, observe a little more seriously the practice of Christ and the Saints, in reference to this poynt, and you shall see nothing lesse then externall Uniformity. See this in the prayer of Christ, (prayer for the duty it self being nothing but so much spirituall worship as being the voyce of the Spirit in the flesh, both in head and members) This Christ sometimes performed with his eyes lifted up to heaven, sometimes being prostrate with his body on the earth, and so severall times severall wayes: and as he, so the Saints have some prayed standing, and lifting up their hands, as *Moses*, some kneeling and lifting up their hands, as *Solomon*, some standing and not lifting up their eyes, as the Publicans, &c. And what externall Uniformity in all this? And as for praying so for preaching, Christ sometimes preached in a ship, sometimes on the shore, sometimes in the City of *Jerusalem*, sometimes in the Temple, sometimes in the desart, sometimes early, sometimes late, as if he intended on purpose to witnesse against that piece of the mystery of iniquity which in after ages should be called *Uniformity*. So *Paul* preached sometimes on the Jews Sabbath, sometimes on the first day of the week, sometimes each day of the week, sometimes in the day, sometimes in the night, sometimes prayed in the house, sometimes on the shore; he circumcised *Timothy* among the weak, refused to circumcise *Titus* among the perverse, became as a Jew to the Jews, as a Greek to the Greeks, to the weak as weak, to the strong as strong, all things to all men, that he might win some. and what externall Uniformity was here? And then for the Sacraments, Christ administred the Sacrament of the Supper immediately after supper, *Paul* at midnight, and it may be others in the morning, or at noone: and what externall Uniformity in all this? And for government; sometimes the Apostles met together into a Conncell and in that Councell ordered things not of their own heads, or by plurality of voyces, but by the Word and Spirit, and what they ordered by the Word and Spirit, they put in execution by the power of the Word and Spirit, and not by the power of the World. At other times Ministers and believers did things by the Word and Spirit among themselves, by the mutuall content of both; or else believers alone

lone among themselves, if there were no Ministers present. And where the number of believers were more, they stood in need of more Officers, and where fewer, of fewer Officers, and all these things are the free ordering of the Churches, who have Christ, the Spirit, and the Father among them and in them, and so are taken out of the bondage of men into the freedome of God. That truly I see not the Gospel more setting its spirit against any thing of Antichrist, then against this point of externall Uniformity. For if we have one Lord, Christ, Spirit, Faith, Baptisme, God, all other things are free to the Churches, as God shall order by them, and no otherwise; and the reason, and wisdome, and prudence of man, have no place in this world, where the Sun of righteousnes shines as the onely light.

But against this that hath been said, do lie some objections: as first,

The Prophet foretold that *the Lord should be one, and his Name one*, and doth not this imply externall Uniformity?

I answer, nothing lesse: for the Apostle explicates plainly and clearly, what it is to have the Lord one, and his Name one among believers, *Eph. 4. ch. 4. 5. 6.* where he saith, there is in the spirituall Church, *one Body, and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptisme, one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in all.* Whereby you see, that among believers there is a manifold Unity, but no externall Uniformity; yea, the prayer of Christ the Son for the Church, unfolds clearly the promise of God the Father to the Church, *John 17.* Christ prayes, *that they all* (who are many among themselves according to the flesh) *may be one, as thou Father art in mee, and I in thee,* (that is, according to the unity of the Spirit, not externall Uniformity) *that after this manner they also may be one in us.*

But againe it is objected out of *1 Cor. 14.* that the Apostle requires that *all things may be done in the Church decently and in order*: and doth not this imply externall Uniformity?

I answer, that they will hardly admit in their parish Churches such a decency and order as the Apostle there means, neither are they capable of it. For he saith before, *When the whole Church is come together into some place, that all may prophesie one by one, that all may learne and all be comforted*: and that during this exercise of prophesying, *if any thing be revealed to another, the former is to give place*; and he must speak that hath the clearest light, seeing the Spirit, to whomsoever it is given to profit withall. And that though all may prophesie one by one, yet all may not prophesie at once, for then it would not be order, but confusion, which the Apostle would have avoyded, saying, *Let all things be done decently and in order.* And this decency too he perswades to by the word, he doth not inforce by secular power. And if they will call this Uniformity, for Church-members to prophesie one after another, according to the variety of the gifts of the Spirit, and not many or two or three at once or the same time, we willingly agree with them: but how farre this thing is from their sence, every one knowes.

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Thus you see these objections answered, and I am confident there are no more can be brought but may as clearly and easily be answered as these.

And therefore, I say, I wonder and wonder againe, that we having covenanted and agreed together solemnly, to endeavour for a Government most agreeable to the word of God, should in the meane time be left so void of the spirit and light of the Gospel, as to fall upon externall Uniformity, which is no where to be found in the Gospel, nor in the practise of primative Christians.

Yea, while I consider more seriously of the Matter, me thinks externall *vniformity* is a monstrous thing (how glorious soever in their eyes) and not to be found either in nature or in grace, either in Christs Kingdome, or the Kingdomes of the world.

In nature is no externall *vniformity* extended to all the workes of nature, for looke into the world and see if there be not variety of forms; heavenly and earthly bodies having severall formes; and in the earth each bird, beast, tree, plant, creature, differs one from another in outward form. If the whole creation should appeare in one form, or externall *vniformity*, what a monstrous thing would it be, nothing differing from the first chaos? but the variety of forms in the world is the beauty of the world. So that though there be a most admirable unity among all the creatures, yet there is nothing lesse then externall *vniformity*.

Againe, as there is no externall *vniformity* spread over the great world, so nor yet over the little world, or man. For looke upon a man consisting of head and members, unto which the Apostle compares the Church, and you shall not finde all the members like one another, neither in regard of their outward forms, nor operations: for the hand doth not move as the foot, nor the foot act as the hand; and if all the members should appear and act in one form, what a monster would a man bee? And yet among the members though there be no externall *vniformity*, yet there is admirable unity.

And yet again, look in to the Kingdomes of the world, and you shall see no such thing in them as externall *vniformity*: Here in *England* you shall observe that *York* is not governed as *Kent*, nor *Hull* as *Hallifax*, nor that as *Bristoll*, *&c.* neither is one County governed uniformly as another; there is no *vniformity* in the government of *Kent* and *Essex*, nor one town governed like another; in Godmanchester, the youngest son inherit, in Huntington the Eldest, nor one Corporation governed like another, nor one Company in the Citie governed as another; and yet between all Counties, Cities, Towns, Corporations Companies, there is unitie, though no externall *vniformity*. Yea, look upon the famous Citie of *London*, and there are, it may be, an hundred thousand families, or more in it, and each one governed after a severall manner, and among all these families there is no externall *vniformity*, and yet they all agree well enough into the unity of a City.

Nay further, to bring but one man to an *vniformity* of life and practice, by

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an outward Law, would be the moſt abſolute tyranny in the world, and make his life worſe then death. To compell every man by a Law every day in the week, or every Munday, Tueſday, &c. in the week, to an *uniformity* of life, that he ſhall riſe at the ſame time, uſe the ſame poſtures, ſpeak the ſame words, eat the ſame food, receive the ſame Phyſick, ſit, and ſtand, and walk, and lye down at the ſame ſet times, who ever heard of ſuch a cruel bondage? What an abſurd and intollerable thing then is *uniformity* in the life of a man, taking away all freedome of the ſoule? But how much more evill and intollerable is *uniformity* in the life of a Chriſtian, or of true Churches of Chriſt, taking away all freedome of the ſpirit of God, who being one with God, works in the freedome of God, and is not to be bound with any authoritative or coercive power, of poor, dark, ignorant, vain, fooliſh, proud, and ſinfull men.

What now then do the Presbyters mean by *Uniformity*? Would they have the Word preached, and the Sacraments adminiſtred, and the Name of God called on, and all this done in ſpirit and truth in the Churches of Chriſt? This truly is *Unity* and not *Uniformity*, and ſuch an *unity* as no man can compell. But would they have the Word preached, the name of God called on, Sacraments adminiſtred, the ſpirituall diſcipline of the ſpirituall Church managed, the vertues of Chriſt, and graces of the Spirit in the Saints exerciſed, and all this in one and the ſame outward form, or uniformity? This is the burden of the Saints, the bondage of the Church, the ſtraitning the Spirit, the limiting of Chriſt, and the eclipſing the glory of the Father. And how wiſe ſoever theſe men may be in naturall and carnall things, yet their wiſedome is but fooliſhneſſe in ſpirituall things, in which there is no more uniformity, then in the workings of the Spirit, who works ſeverally in ſeverall Saints, and ſeverally in the ſame Saints at ſeverall times. And therefore they that would tye the Church to an *uniformity* which works not of it ſelf, but as the Spirit works in it, let them firſt tye the Spirit to an *uniformity*, and we are contented. But theſe men ſeem to run a ſad hazard, who would thus reduce the workings of the Spirit in Chriſtians and Churches, to an outward *uniformity*, according to their own minde and fancy, and ſo would rule and order, and enlarge and ſtraiten the Spirit of God by the ſpirit of man; ſeeing it is worſe to ſin againſt Chriſt in the ſpirit, then againſt Chriſt in the fleſh.

And therefore till I be otherwiſe taught by the Word, I cannot conceive that there ought to be or is poſſible to be any ſuch externall *uniformity* in the Churches of Chriſt, as theſe men ſtrive, wraſtle, ſweat, contend for, I will not ſay are ready to fight for, but that ſeverall Churches of Chriſt having unity of doctrine, faith, the ſpirit, ordinances, &c. may have divers forms of outward adminiſtrations, as God and Chriſt by the ſpirit ſhall lead them; and that every Church is in theſe things to be left free, and no Church forced by any outward power to follow or imitate another Church againſt its will, not being freely led unto it by the Spirit of God.

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Neither do I think that God hath set up any company of men, or Synod in the world, to shine to a whole Nation, so that all people shall be constrained to follow their judgement, and to walk by their light, seeing other Ministers and Christians may have more light and spirit then they. Neither hath Christ promised his presence and spirit to Ministers more then to believers, nor more to an hundred then two or three: and if two or three Christians in the Country being met together in the name of Christ, have Christ himself with his Word and Spirit among them, they need not ride many miles to the Assembly at *London*, to know what to do, or how to carry and behave themselves in the things of God. And therefore for any company of men of what repute soever, to set up their own judgement in a Kingdome, for a peremptory rule from which no man must vary, and to compell all the faithfull people of God, who are the very members of Jesus Christ himself, to fall down before it, upon pain of being cast into the burning fiery furnace of their indignation, heated seven times more hot then ordinary, through the desired accesse of secular power to their power, is a far worse work in my eyes, then that of King *Nebuchadnezzar*, setting up a golden Image, and forcing all to fall down before it; seeing spirituall idolatry is so much worse then corporall, as the spirit is better then the flesh.

And therefore I do think (let them teach me better by the Word that can) that *uniformity* (the great *Diana* of the *Presbyterians*, and the Image that falls down from the brain and fancy of man) hath no footing in the Scriptures, or in the practice of the Churches of Christ: And that the *Presbyterian uniformity* is near a kin to Prelatiall conformity, and is no other then the same thing under another word, after the manner of *Prelacy* and *Presbytery*; and do conclude that *Unity* is Christian, *Uniformity* Antichristian.

And this I have only [illegible] among many occasions, to discover to the faithfull, [illegible] of the very dregs of [illegible] still prevail and [illegible] the very name of *Reformation*: And also to give occasion to [illegible] more spirit, and [illegible] to discourse more fully [illegible] which is so carefully nourished by [illegible] may be [illegible] the power of the Word.